

Mornings are for coffee and admiration by TheMikeWheelers (jasongracefully)

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Summary:

Coffeeshop AU

Mornings are for coffee and admiration

Mike had been working at the coffeeshop for a few months now, ever since his friends had all started looking for jobs to save up for college, he began to search too. He ended up finding the Help Wanted sign up at Hawkins Brew, the rustic-yet-cozy place his mother liked to stop in every day, occasionally taking her son with him. He applied for the job, met the sweet old lady who owned the place, and had been working there ever since.

That was about three months ago now, and everyday since, Mike's sorta-friend-but-felt-like-more, El, would stop in to order something and hang out in one of the leather armchairs by the window while she read or worked on homework or did anything else to pass the time with her coffee.

Normally she came in with one of the boys or Joyce, but today-- Valentine's Day coincidentally-- she was alone.

"One latte for someone I like a latte."

El smirked up at the boy standing before her, donning a brown apron with the coffeehouse's logo, "You make that pun every chance you get."

"Well it makes you smile every time," Mike grinned, before pulling over a chair and sitting next to her.

"Don't you have to work?" El silently wished he didn't have to, she would enjoy some company with her coffee.

"Lucky for you I'm on my break."

El let herself beam brightly at this for a second before she felt the blood rush to her cheeks, and tried to distract herself before she knew she would surely turn pink, "How's work today?"

"Busier than normal." Mike shrugged, his hands gesturing towards all the decorations up in the coffeeshop, from the Cupids hanging from the ceiling, to the bright red hearts on the walls, "Apparently

Valentine's Day is for some reason a big day for coffee."

"Dustin was going to come with me, but his boss asked him to come in last minute because of how busy it is."

El leaned in to take a sip from her coffee, the froth giving her a small mustache that had Mike's heart beating faster. He wanted to kiss the froth right off her lips, and he was having trouble stopping his impulse control from doing just that.

The logical part of his brain knew that was a bad idea though-- a *very bad idea*. Sure, he could think about kissing Eleven all he wanted, but Mike knew at the end of the day, no matter how much it felt like maybe there was a tiny possibility someday they could be otherwise, right now they were friends. You don't randomly kiss your friends just because they have a froth mustache from their latte.

El put her cup back down, wiping her face and letting Mike's heart begin to slow down. Her eyes fluttered over the coffee before turning to look at Mike, "What's that?" She asked, gesturing towards the now slightly misshapen heart Mike had attempted to create in the froth.

Mike looked down at the cup, and refused to look away. He felt his cheeks heat up and even though it was the middle of February, he knew he was sweating like a hot day in June. He had made the heart during a slight moment of boldness and bravery-- back when he was behind the counter and didn't have to look El in the eye-- but now that it was right there in front of her, and she had noticed and asked about it, Mike felt nothing but regret about his impulse.

"It was, uh, something my manager came up with for Valentine's. We need to make those on every coffee," He lied, feeling guilty immediately yet still bound with refusal to tell her the truth.

El let out a simple, "Oh," before turning away, returning to sipping her drink and eventually pulling out a newspaper.

She had started doing crosswords years ago. It was Hopper's idea, it was a good, educational puzzle that could help her learn new words and keep up with latest events and culture. They were challenging at first, but Eleven was determined and every day, no matter how long

it took her, she finished the crossword in the Hawkins Gazette.

She had started years ago now, and with time she had become a master at these. There was the occasional word she needed help on, but for the most part El always knew what she was doing.

The crossword that day was all Valentine's Day themed, and Mike watched as El tapped her pencil, filling in words one by one. He loved watching her do them, the way she pursed her lips in thought, and her eyes rolled over to the side. Mike could practically see the gears in her mind turning-- and he adored it.

Eventually, though, her brows began to furrow and she turned towards the boy besides her, "Mike, help me with this one."

"What is it?" He scooted his chair closer to her, despite the fact he could see the puzzle just fine from where he already was.

"Thirteen down. 'Regarding with warm approval.' Ten letters, second letter is D, the sixth letter is A and it ends with an N."

Mike bit down on his lip, thinking for a moment, "Try 'admiration.'"

El went to write it in, but her hand hesitated for a moment. She turned towards Mike with that shy look of insecurity that had become all-too common in her life, the feeling of her brain drowning and struggling in the waves and she could do nothing to help but yell at herself, *Come on! You should know this! Why don't you know anything?!*

"Mike."

"Hm?"

"What, uh, what does that mean?" She felt that embarrassed blush make her way up her neck. *You should know this. Mike is going to think you're weird for not knowing.*

The logical part of El's mind knew Mike wouldn't ever judge her for that, but that didn't change what her insecurities yelled at her.

"Admiration?" Mike asked, "It's kinda like when you look at someone

and you just know that you like them. This warm feeling fills you because of how much you look up to them.”

El nodded, feeling her blush worsen. That only got worse when she heard Mike whisper quietly, mostly to himself yet still loud enough for El to barely hear, “I admire you.” Suddenly El was blushing even more, but for an entirely different reason.

“I admire you too.” She faced him, and for a second El swore it seemed like Mike’s face was inching closer to hers.

“Well how are you kids doing today?”

El jumped back suddenly, the reminder that they were in public surrounded by people (and that she shouldn't have been leaning towards Mike to begin with) was dripping in.

“Good morning Mrs. Hotchkiss.” Mike rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly. Mrs. Hotchkiss was the sweet elderly woman who owned Hawkins Brew. Since Mike had begun working at the coffeehouse and she saw the customer who he came over to during his breaks everyday, Mrs. Hotchkiss had taken a special interest in El.

Eleven smiled at her, “Happy Valentine’s Day,” she added.

“A happy Valentine’s to you too, Ellie,” She added, leaning in to whisper and point to the decorations around the room, “As you can see I’m rather fond of the holiday myself.”

“Mike was telling me about your idea for the hearts in the coffee earlier.”

“What idea?”

“Making hearts in the foam.” El gestured down towards her drink and Mike’s neck began to heat up. He just had to put that damn heart in her latte, one thoughtless moment of bravery was now putting him in an incredible awkward position.

Mike hoped Mrs. Hotchkiss would just roll with what El was telling her, instead of telling her that *no, that wasn't something anyone had to do today. Mike chose to do that for you all on his own.* However, Mike

didn't exactly want to stick around to find out what she said. He stood up from his seat, distracting the two for a moment, "My break is almost over, I should go back to work."

El's smile faded slightly, "I'm gonna leave in a little bit. Call me later?"

"Of course." Mike hurried away from the table, running back behind the counter.

Mrs. Hotchkiss stayed behind chatting with El for a while, and Mike struggled to keep from staring at the two while he worked, settling for the occasional glance over to the window. He tried to focus on working, making sure he didn't mess up any of the orders and making coffee his main priority.

He placed the lid on top of a drink, placing it on the counter. "Medium espresso for Lisa!" Mike called out, then quickly taking a glimpse over to the window again. Mrs. Hotchkiss had left, and El was working on her crossword some more. She was tapping her pencil on her cheek in thought, and Mike gave out a dopey grin watching her.

He looked down, feeling a blush make way on his face, and went back to the coffee machines. That was when he felt a hand gently touch his shoulder and spun around.

Mrs. Hotchkiss stood behind him, "It's Valentine's Day. You're young, you shouldn't be working today," She said to him.

Mike looked down at his feet, suddenly feeling very uncomfortable with the situation, "I, uh, don't really have anyone to spend today with."

"Not El?"

A blush erupted all over his face, not wanting to discuss his feelings for his friend with his boss. It wasn't like anything was even happening between him and El anyway, "You know we're just friends."

"Don't take time for granted," She gave a maternal smile to Mike, "Be

with the people you love while you can.”

Mike knew Mrs. Hotchkiss’s husband had died about a year before. They had opened the coffeehouse together, and now it was only hers. She knew what it was like to lose people, and she knew the importance of utilizing the time you had.

But Mike knew what it was like to lose people too. He had lost El for a year, he was sure she was dead and never coming back to him. Then she did come back, and Mike was thrilled, and somewhere along the way, the shock of seeing her again washed away all those fantasies he had harbored for a year, all those wishes that he could talk to her just a little bit more to let her know how he felt, to just spend as much time with her as he could.

“Take the rest of the day off, sweetheart. Try and do something useful with it.”

“But you need people working. I mean, it’s a holiday. Don’t you need as many workers as you can?” Mike stammered.

“Some things are more important than work.” She patted him on the shoulder, “The morning rush is long over by now. There’s enough people here to cover the rest of the day.”

“Wow, uh, thank you Mrs. Hotchkiss.” Mike didn’t know how to respond, taking off his apron and feeling sweat pool in his hands as it sunk in that he was just given Valentine’s Day off to spend with the girl that he wasn’t even dating.

He made his way back over to the table El was sitting at. She had finished her crossword and looked like she was about to leave, until she saw Mike heading her way and grinned.

“Why aren’t you working?” She tried to contain her smirk.

“I have the rest of the day off,” Mike said, his voice hitching as he considered his next words, “Do you want to go to the movies or something? And maybe we could go to dinner afterward?”

El nodded her head, “Okay.”

“A- As a date?” Mike stammered, the entire coffeeshop suddenly seeming to fall silent as he anticipated her response. Thoughts jumped around in Mike’s head, each one popping out over another to give a new reason why this was a terrible idea, but they were caught off by the sight of El erupting in a pink blush.

“I’d love to.”